

Andree Greenberg - FW: Cargill developer explores desal plant

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Subject: FW: Cargill developer explores desal plant

Shin-Roei, Andree –

I want to make sure you saw this latest development on the water front. This would require new and different permitting, I believe? Possibly power as well. We are also awaiting news about how they will deal with the existing sewage.

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In the news this weekend, Cargill/DMB are on to their latest unlikely scenario for supplying water to their controversial bayfill plan to build a new city in a salt pond. This one, uncovered by Save The Bay, smacks of real desperation: a desalination plant, to be built in Redwood Shores. First, the developers proposed pumping potentially toxic groundwater from under the restorable salt pond site (2009), followed by somehow transferring private Kern River "paper water" from agricultural use (2010). Now, with their own consultants advising against groundwater and Bay Area water districts and Central Valley farmers balking at the transfer, Cargill/DMB's pursuit of desalination would be their third water plan in three years.

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Hold the salt: Developer explores using desalinated water for Saltworks project

By Bonnie Eslinger
Daily News Staff Writer
 Posted: 02/04/2012

Among many challenges facing the controversial Redwood City Saltworks project, securing water for a community that may have as many as 12,000 homes is high on the list.

DMB Pacific Ventures, a new company owned by Arizona-based DMB Associates that wants to develop Saltworks on Cargill's salt flats, has promised not to tap into Redwood City's limited water supply to hydrate the massive 1,436-acre project, which also would include office buildings, stores, schools, playing fields and restored marshlands.

Until recently, DMB has been focusing on a complex maneuver to transfer the rights to 2.7 billion gallons of water a year purchased from a Bakersfield farming collective to a Bay Area water agency for delivery.

While the transfer strategy is still "on the table," the company also is examining whether delivering ocean or bay water stripped of salt and other minerals is feasible, said David Smith, DMB Associates' senior vice president. That process is known as desalination.

"We're looking at the full universe of options," Smith told The Daily News on Friday.

Although many water agencies and cities are studying desalination as a possible answer to water shortages, Smith acknowledged it's a complicated route.

In the North Bay, a proposed desalination plant in San Rafael was successfully challenged in court by environmentalists and others concerned that its potential impact on marine habitat wasn't fully studied. The Marin Municipal Water District recently appealed the court's ruling that the environmental impact report was inadequate.

And while the city of Santa Cruz is currently doing an environmental study for a desalination plan, opponents are gathering petition signatures to put the project before voters for approval.

Rich Mills, a water use and efficiency expert with the California Department of Water Resources, said environmental concerns about desalination are legitimate, such as the potential for fish and other marine life to be sucked into treatment plants. But desalination is being considered out of necessity, he added.

"As the demands for water continue to increase and the development of new water supplies becomes more difficult, we're having to research all alternatives -- conservation, water recycling of municipal waste water, desalination and urban storm water runoff recovery and use," Mills said. "These are kind of the less-than-mainstream water resources that are being looked at more carefully now."

A DMB-funded consultant hired by Redwood City to do an environmental study of the Saltworks project began investigating desalination as a feasible option last June, said Blake Lyon, the city's senior planner. Questions such as where a plant would go, how big it might be and whether it should provide water only for Saltworks still have to be answered, he said.

"There's also a lot of work that needs to be done on the environmental implications, whether there's political support for it, and the funding aspects," Lyon said.

But the research was temporarily shelved in November when DMB Associates asked for a timeout while the developer reviews the most recent round of public comments and possibly revises the project.

Smith said the company intends to present a revised plan by "early 2012."

Josh Sonnenfeld, a campaign manager with Oakland-based Save the Bay, said DMB's struggles to secure water for the large-scale community prove the project is impractical.

"There's also enormous numbers of questions we have about desalination, the impacts on the bay, the potential costs to residents and the energy it needs."

The nonprofit has vigorously opposed the Saltworks development plan and advocated for restoration of the area's natural habitat.